Introduction: Youth transitions in times of labour market insecurity

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Description of the problem and research questions

Labour market insecurities are widespread among young people in Europe, and they represent a key challenge to society. Comparative research has shown that, across Europe, youth often experience labour market exclusion in terms of periods of unemployment and episodes of being not in employment, education, or training (NEET) (Eurofound, 2012; Dietrich, 2013; Lange et al., 2014; O’Reilly et al., 2015; Rokicka et al., 2018). Moreover, if young people actually do find a job, they often face job insecurity in the form of temporary jobs (Baranowska and Gebel, 2010; Karamessini et al., 2019; Passaretta and Wolbers, 2019). Indeed, labour market insecurities hit young people more often than the rest of the population in Europe (Breen, 2005; Baranowska and Gebel, 2010).

However, counter to the rhetoric in public and political debates, trend studies cannot confirm a general increase in youth NEET and temporary employment over time (Gebel and Giesecke, 2016). Instead, there are strong cyclical components, because youth are affected specifically by business cycle fluctuations (Dietrich, 2013; Lange et al., 2014). They were affected particularly during crises such as the 2008 financial crisis and the subsequent debt and Eurozone crises (Choudhry et al., 2012; Marques and Hörisch, 2020). Such crises are expected to have a potentially detrimental effect on the future of these young people in the form of ‘scar effects’ (Unt and Täht, 2020). Indeed, concerns have been raised as to whether the so-called Great Recession has produced a ‘lost generation’ of young people (Hur, 2018). It is still too early to assess the full impact of the current COVID-19 pandemic on youth labour markets, but indications suggest that it is giving rise to the most severe economic recession for decades in most European
countries, and prevailing uncertainty about prospects and projections give great cause for concern.

European comparative research has highlighted that the extent of youth labour market problems varies widely across countries (Saar et al., 2008; Karamessini et al., 2019; O’Reilly et al., 2019a, 2019b; Dvoulety et al., 2020). Previous research has revealed that this cross-country variation can be related to differences in the structural, institutional, and cultural contexts across Europe. In this respect, policies come into play that modify contexts in such a way that they improve youth labour market chances (Lahusen et al., 2013; Caliendo and Schmidl, 2016; Hora et al., 2019).

Since the 1990s and particularly following the financial crisis in 2008, this problem has been a high priority for policymakers at both national and European levels, and numerous initiatives have been developed to overcome it. For example, the Europe 2020 strategy makes explicit reference to promoting youth employment chances through better education policies. The Youth on the Move flagship initiative aims to improve the qualifications and labour market integration of youth (European Commission, 2010a) and the European Social Fund Youth Opportunities Initiative has promoted vocational and apprenticeship training for youth to support smooth transitions from education to work (European Commission, 2011). In 2012, the EU launched the Youth Guarantee Scheme (YGS) which promised to offer good quality jobs or education opportunities (for example apprenticeships) for young people facing labour market problems (Eichhorst and Rinne, 2017; Escudero and Mourelo, 2017). In 2016, the YGS was extended to support school-to-work transition under the Investing in Europe’s Youth programme, and also to provide better opportunities through education and training systems, and learning mobility (European Commission, 2016). The YGS, as an open method of coordination, does not prescribe one common active labour market policy (ALMP), but calls for alignment to specific local circumstances and mutual learning (Tosun et al. 2017; Tosun et al., 2019a). In their European comparative study, Tosun et al. (2019a) have shown that the YGS led to some catching-up and convergence with regard to the sectoral coverage of active labour market policies, but also to divergence in the number of policies. Regarding the risks of social exclusion, the Europe 2020 strategy integrated guidelines for economic and employment policies that also propagated active inclusion policies for vulnerable young people. Next to the EU-level initiatives, a large array of policy measures in different education, labour market, and social policy fields
exist on national and regional levels that aim to improve youth labour market integration and social inclusion.

Against this background, the first central research question emerging in this book asks about the consequences of labour market insecurities for young people. The book addresses the multifaceted consequences that arise on the individual level, in order to find out what the implications are for the young persons affected. To capture this multidimensionality, research is framed in the field of social exclusion. The concept of social exclusion is particularly relevant for youth and has been on the agenda of European social policies for some time. One example is the Europe 2020 flagship initiative European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion (European Commission, 2010b). Specifically, the researchers in this book investigate the implications of experiencing individual labour market insecurities for the subjective well-being and health of young people, their chances of gaining autonomy through leaving the parental home, of gaining economic independence from parents, as well as their short-, medium-, and long-term economic situation in terms of their risk of poverty and material deprivation, together with their eligibility for social security. This comprehensive view offers an opportunity to identify the complex interrelationships and potential risks of cumulative disadvantage.

The second central research question relates to the coping strategies and compensatory mechanisms that facilitate social inclusion for disadvantaged youth. While it is important to understand what the consequences of labour market insecurity are, it is also important to understand what can be done to mitigate negative consequences (O’Rand, 2009). Mitigation can function on various levels. This book refers to coping strategies and compensatory mechanisms on the microlevel and the mesolevel. First of all, the young person who is affected has the agency to deal with the emerging problems and try to mitigate the consequences or find ways to compensate for the negative effects of experiencing labour market insecurity. Moreover, family members, friends, and local communities and neighbourhoods can step in and help young people who are in need (Tosun et al, 2019b; Tosun et al, 2021). Finally, other mesolevel actors which the young person has to deal with or contacts voluntarily such as public employment agencies can also intervene to provide help (Shore and Tosun, 2019).

On the macrolevel, policies are designed to help mitigate the risks of social exclusion that may arise in response to labour market insecurities (Lahusen et al, 2013; Caliendo and Schmidl, 2016). This leads to the third central research question: Which policies are effective in mitigating the
negative effects of labour market insecurity? Because this book studies the multifaceted consequences of labour market insecurity for the risk of social exclusion, it is important to investigate the various policy fields that exist to address specific social exclusion risks. This complements the great majority of studies on how policies can reduce youth labour market problems by investigating which policies can actually help those young people who are currently affected by labour market insecurity. As long as youth labour market problems continue to exist, it is also necessary to know how to help young people who are affected.

In sum, this book addresses the following three central research questions:

1. What are the multifaceted consequences on the individual level of labour market insecurities for young people’s risk of social exclusion?
2. What coping strategies and compensatory mechanisms on the individual level and the meso-level facilitate social inclusion for disadvantaged youth?
3. Which policies are effective in terms of mitigating the negative effects of labour market insecurities on young people’s risk of social exclusion?

The following section briefly reviews the state of the art regarding comparative research on youth labour market insecurities and explains the present innovative contribution of this edited volume to the existing literature and its main research aims. The next section introduces the multilevel theoretical model that acts as the conceptual and theoretical backbone of this book. This is followed by an explanation of the multimethod comparative approach adopted in this European project. The final section outlines the structure of the book and the individual chapters.

**State of the art, innovative contribution, and main aims**

There have been several European comparative studies on various determinants of individual-level labour market insecurity. These include, for example, the major volumes by O’Reilly et al (2019a, 2019b) which offer a systematic comparison of European youth labour markets. Moreover, based on three-generational interviews in eleven European countries, Tosun et al (2019b, 2021) have substantially increased knowledge on the role and intergenerational
transmission of values and norms as important supply-side determinants of youth labour market chances. Based on the same data, Dvouletý et al (2020) have documented a variety of individual-level and family background variables as predictors of unemployment in young adults. There is also a long tradition of European comparative studies on the macrolevel determinants of individual-level labour market insecurity that emphasise the role of economic and other structural conditions such as globalisation, youth cohort size, educational expansion, or occupational upgrading (Gangl, 2002; Lange et al, 2014); the education and training system (Shavit and Müller, 1998; Müller and Gangl, 2003; Kogan et al, 2011); labour market regulation and institutions (Breen, 2005; Baranowska and Gebel, 2010; Barbieri et al, 2016; Gebel and Giesecke, 2016); and active and passive labour market policies (ALMPs and PLMPs) (Hvinden et al, 2019a; Marques and Hörisch, 2020).

However, there is much less European comparative research on the consequences of individual-level labour market insecurity for young people. Notable exceptions are Blossfeld et al’s (2005) comparative studies on the effects of temporary employment and unemployment on the timing of leaving the parental home, and Hvinden et al’s (2019b) work on the multitude of effects of job insecurity on well-being, drug use, and later wage consequences. In a comparative qualitative study of six European countries, Kieselbach et al (2001) provided in-depth insights into the social exclusion experiences of long-term unemployed youth. Moreover, there are a few comparative studies on the moderating role of social inequality, education policies, labour market conditions, and institutions in aggravating or mitigating the job insecurity effect (Stasiowski and Klóbuszewska, 2018; Högberg et al, 2019a, 2019b; Täht et al, 2020).

Thus, previous research has focused mainly on the drivers of youth labour market problems. However, given that despite all political efforts many young people experience labour market insecurity, it is not only the drivers but also the consequences that have become a growing concern. Given that the youth transition period is a central stage which affects every aspect of the individual’s future life course, this key topic urgently warrants further attention. This book addresses exactly this research gap by studying the multifaceted consequences of labour market insecurities on risks of social exclusion. Specifically, as mentioned before, it investigates how individual-level labour market insecurities affect the subjective well-being and health of young people, their chance of gaining autonomy by leaving the parental home, their chance of gaining economic independence from parents, as well as their short-, medium-, and long-term economic situation in terms of their risk of poverty and
material deprivation, together with their eligibility for social security. In this way, the book overcomes the limitations of previous research that focused on single dimensions, and it adds new evidence on dimensions that have not yet been in the spotlight of research. Nonetheless, it has to be acknowledged that there are further dimensions of social exclusion in terms of, for example, deviant behaviour, social participation, and political participation, however it goes beyond the scope of this book to focus on an in-depth understanding of these dimensions.

Moreover, the book augments the existing literature by conducting empirical analyses that are framed in a common theoretical multilevel model. The backbone of this model is the microlevel analysis of the effects of labour market insecurities on various risks of social exclusion in a dynamic and life course perspective. Following the seminal study by Gallie and Paugam (2000), the social consequences of labour market exclusion should be understood as a dynamic process of social exclusion acting as a downward spiral of progressive disadvantages. Thus, next to approaching the issue of youth social exclusion from a standard cross-sectional social-indicator-based perspective, the book seeks to gain new insights by analysing the timing, ordering, and causal interrelationships of youth experiences of labour market insecurities and various other dimensions of social exclusion from a dynamic individual-level perspective. This dynamic process perspective is complemented with a life course perspective by providing an analysis of the short- and long-term consequences of labour market insecurity for multiple risks of social exclusion for young people. Regarding the mesolevel in terms of families/households, communities, and organisations (firms, public employment agencies, and so on), the book studies how these other actors either support young people in mitigating or compensating for the negative effects of labour market insecurities or in some circumstances worsen their situation. Similarly, it investigates how the institutional, structural, and cultural macrolevel context either buffers or worsens the effects of labour market insecurities on risks of social exclusion.

On the macrolevel, the specific objective of the book is to study contextual effects, particularly the role of labour market, economic, family, housing, and social policies in aggravating or mitigating the negative effects of labour market insecurities. Whereas previous policy-related research has looked mainly at the effects of policies on labour market insecurity itself, this book adds another important perspective by focusing on the moderating role of policies on the effects of labour market insecurity on young people’s risk of social exclusion. Previous research is also partly challenged, because policies can have different effects as a driver of insecurities or as a moderator of the consequences of insecurities. Based
on multilevel analyses, this book highlights relevant policy conclusions, outlining the context and policies supporting young people in disadvantaged labour market positions. Whereas some chapters single out the effects of specific policies by taking a macroindicator approach, other chapters aim to understand the combined effect of policies by using a country-typology approach.

Another specific aim and contribution of this book is its multimethod and European comparative approach. European comparative research has highlighted that the extent of labour market problems for young people varies widely across countries (for example, Blossfeld et al, 2008, 2011; O’Reilly et al, 2015; Tosun et al, 2019b, 2021). This book uses a multimethod design to study how the consequences of labour market problems differ across Europe. Whereas such a design is not innovative per se, the rigorous implementation of a European comparative design in each chapter is one of the book’s original contributions. Chapters providing comparative quantitative analyses of European microdata use empirical multilevel analyses to quantify the moderating role of the macrolevel context and, specifically, the effects of policies. The unique innovation lies in the chapters applying a European comparative qualitative approach (Bertolini et al, 2018). This is an especially valuable contribution, given the almost complete lack of comparative qualitative literature on young people’s perceptions of labour market exclusion and job insecurity. Thus, it overcomes the limits of previous qualitative research that focused on single countries and aims to generate new findings by listening to the voice of young people in various European countries.

**Theoretical multilevel model**

This book focuses on young people, using the terms youth and young adults as synonyms. Static age definitions (for example, 15–24 years) as commonly imposed are not practicable for the present research purposes. Given the research interest in the consequences of labour market integration problems, it is necessary to investigate young people who have already left the education system, and this does not apply to all members of a specific age group. Because the labour market entry process has been delayed in recent decades due to educational expansion (Buchmann and Kriesi, 2011), a low upper age limit cannot be imposed. It would systematically exclude young people who have experienced higher education. Because the book also aims to investigate labour market integration problems and the consequences these have for young people with higher education, it applies a higher upper age
limit. Moreover, given the interest in both the short- and long-term consequences of labour market problems in the early career stage, it is also necessary to look at a longer period following the transition from education to work. Hence, the book follows the life course paradigm and considers life course events and their consequences from an individual dynamic perspective (Elder et al., 2004; Mayer, 2009).

The individual-level dynamic perspective is also highly relevant when studying social exclusion as a dynamic process (Gallie et al., 2003). The book studies social exclusion from a life course perspective, looking not only at the short term but also at the medium- and long-term consequences for later life periods. The dynamic process and life course perspectives are crucial to better detecting mechanisms that could combat or compensate for youth social exclusion.

Following insights from previous research (Gallie et al., 2003), in this book, social exclusion is understood as a multidimensional concept that entails economic, social, and psychological consequences. Whereas labour market exclusion can be seen as part of the broader concept of social exclusion, this dimension is singled out as a key explanatory variable because of the interest in the impact of labour market exclusion on other dimensions of social exclusion which are treated as outcome variables. As mentioned earlier, the focus is on the subjective well-being and health of young adults, their chances of gaining autonomy by leaving the parental home, their chances of gaining economic independence from parents and forming their own families, as well as their short- and long-term economic situation in terms of risks of poverty and material deprivation, together with their eligibility for social security.

Another important aspect of life course theory that is taken into account here is that individual agency and life courses are socially embedded in higher-level contexts. The individual agency of young people is bound closely to the opportunities and constraints in their family, friends, and community. At the same time, families, schools, companies, youth centres, and public employment agencies are constrained in their opportunities and choices by the institutional, structural, and cultural macrocontext at the national level. National level policies influence and are influenced by EU-level initiatives through the set of programmes and measures such as the YGS. Figure 1.1 illustrates the theoretical multilevel model in this respect.

The microlevel context

The book analyses the effect of labour market exclusion and job insecurity on various dimensions of social exclusion on the microlevel.
From a life course perspective, this addresses the important aspect of intraindividual spillover effects, because it investigates how one life domain (work) affects other life domains. Some chapters also investigate crossover effects – that is, interindividual effects of the life course of one person on the life course of another person. In general, on the individual level, it is important to analyse the decisions of individual agents who make choices and reach compromises regarding different alternatives and the implications that arise from these. It is also relevant to understand the subjective perspectives of young people and how they perceive and cope with the consequences of labour market insecurities.

Labour market exclusion and job insecurity are the key microlevel explanatory variables. Labour market exclusion is defined here as NEET (Eurofound, 2012). Overcoming the shortcomings of the stricter concept of youth unemployment (young people who are not employed but are available and actively searching for work), the NEET concept also makes it possible to capture youth who become discouraged and give up any job search as well as inactive persons who cannot or do not want to work. The analyses here acknowledge this heterogeneity within the NEET group (Eurofound, 2012). They do not apply a broader conception that defines labour market exclusion as also being part of the secondary labour market segment – that is, as being
from good jobs in the primary segment. This is because this aspect is already partly covered in the definition of job insecurity.

Regarding the theoretical concept of job insecurity, the book distinguishes between objective and subjective job insecurity (de Witte, 2010). For example, questions about the fear or expectations of job loss in the near future can be used as measures of the subjective feeling of job insecurity. Objective indicators relate to the type of contract such as temporary work contracts, temporary agency work, seasonal/casual work, or non-contractual informal work arrangements that are all usually accompanied by a high risk of job loss (Barbieri, 2009; Kalleberg, 2009).

The two major concepts of labour market exclusion and job insecurity are subsumed under the overarching concept of labour market insecurity. Hence, this key concept is defined on the individual level, because of the interest in the individual-level consequences of experiencing labour market insecurities. Moreover, labour market insecurities also come into play as a macrolevel factor that will be explained later.

On the individual level, various consequences of labour market insecurity for social exclusion are considered. The outcomes under scrutiny in the current project are young people’s subjective well-being and health, autonomy and socio-economic situation. The key dependent variables are defined in the following paragraphs. The individual chapters of this book apply specific theories in order to explain how individual labour market insecurities affect the outcome dimensions.

From a conceptual point of view, a specific definition of subjective well-being is applied that includes a cognitive (that is, global judgements of life satisfaction) and an affective component of positive feelings (happiness) and negative feelings (sadness) (Diener, 2009). The book does not apply a wider definition of well-being including such aspects as material living conditions and individual economic and financial situations, because these dimensions are covered by other outcome variables. Regarding health, both subjective and objective indicators are used to rate the physical and psychological health status of young people (Jylhä, 2009).

Autonomy is conceptualised as housing and economic autonomy from the parental household. Broader conceptions of economic self-sufficiency also emphasise financial independence from the welfare state (Tosun et al, 2019b, 2021). Leaving the parental home and establishing an independent household can be regarded as one of the most important requirements for housing autonomy and achieving the status
of an autonomous adult. Leaving the home of origin is a key marker of the transition to adulthood (Corijn and Klijzing, 2001). It implies not only housing independence but also greater social autonomy for young people (Billari, 2004). However, housing autonomy does not necessarily coincide with economic independence (Walther, 2006; Baranowska-Rataj et al, 2015). Hence, economic autonomy is considered as a second autonomy concept. This is a self-assessment of whether a young person’s personal economic resources are sufficient to meet her or his own needs. Thus, economic autonomy is not dependent on a fixed threshold, but on the relative coherence between economic resources and needs. A low level of autonomy often implies economic dependence on the family (in terms of transfers) and/or the state (in terms of social benefits).

The socio-economic situation is also considered as a multidimensional phenomenon. Disadvantage may take different forms: On the one hand, it may refer to aspects of income poverty – that is, falling below an income threshold considered to reflect poverty (Sen, 1983). On the other hand, it may reflect deprivation in consumption levels in multiple domains (Nolan and Whelan, 1996). The aim here is to investigate socio-economic disadvantage from both an individual perspective (focusing on individual work or transfer income) and a household perspective (focusing on the material deprivation of the entire household in which a young person is living). Objective deprivation indicators will be contrasted with European young adults’ subjective perceptions of their socio-economic situation. Furthermore, analyses are not restricted to the immediate socio-economic consequences of labour market uncertainty, but also investigate its impact in the medium and long term. In terms of long-term effects, one interest is in whether and to what extent young adults are able to make provision for social security and pensions, both publicly funded and private.

The moderating mesolevel context

On the mesolevel, the family is a central institution. Life course research emphasises that individual lives are strongly linked to those of relevant others such as parents, siblings, partners, friends, and neighbours (Mayer, 2009). This is expressed by the principle of linked lives which states that lives are interdependent and influenced by networks (Elder et al, 2004). Specifically, it is assumed that the resources and attitudes of the family of origin (parents, siblings, and relatives) and the family of destination (partner and partner’s family) are relevant. Tosun et al (2019b, 2021) emphasise the role of values, personality traits,
self-efficacy, subjective norms, and entrepreneurial orientation that are transmitted from parents to children and shown to be of great importance for youth labour market chances. In the literature on the transition to adulthood, it becomes evident that the family of origin plays an important role, influencing all the different components of the process such as the transition to work, to independence from the parental family, to personal autonomy, to sexuality, partnership, and parenthood, as well as to citizenship (Arnett, 2000).

Moreover, communities and organisations also come into play on the mesolevel. For example, schools and work environments have major socialising functions for young persons (Kraaykamp et al, 2019). Public employment services are important state organisations that should support and guide youth who face labour market problems (Shore and Tosun, 2019).

Thus, the mesolevel affects the probability of labour market insecurity as well as the outcome variables of interest – that is, individual health, well-being, autonomy, and socio-economic situation. However, the particular interest here is in the moderating effect of the mesolevel on the effects of labour market insecurity on the social exclusion outcome dimensions. In this regard, mesolevel actors are expected to play a central role for young people who are coping with the individual consequences of labour market insecurities. The individual chapters analysing the moderating mesocontext provide specific theoretical arguments on the causal mechanisms for moderating effects.

The moderating macrolevel context

Young people’s individual life courses are socially embedded in the institutional, structural, and cultural macrocontext. This defines the set of opportunities and constraints that young people face when making their life course decisions and transitions (Leisering, 2003; Mayer, 2004; Blossfeld et al, 2005, 2008; Buchmann and Kriesi, 2011). The macrocontext varies across countries and, depending on the extent of federal state structures, also across regions within countries. Although the book refers to some EU policy initiatives that target youth, it does not address the role of the EU directly, because EU policies usually impact on individuals indirectly via national policies. The macrocontext influences the probability of young people experiencing labour market insecurities as well as the outcome variables. However, the particular interest here lies in its moderating effect – that is, how contextual factors moderate the individual-level effects of labour insecurities on the outcomes. From a multilevel analysis perspective, this represents a
cross-level interaction – that is, how the effect of a microlevel variable on another microlevel variable is moderated by a macrolevel variable. The individual book chapters analysing the moderating macrocontext provide specific theoretical arguments on the causal mechanisms for moderating effects.

In terms of structural factors, the focus is on aggregate economic and labour market conditions. Economic conditions are best captured by the level of gross domestic product (GDP) and its growth rate. Business cycle fluctuations are also separated from long-term economic growth trends. In this way, the book also captures the role of the economic recession. Labour market conditions can be measured by the aggregate unemployment rate on the (national) macrolevel that may moderate the effects of individual-level labour market insecurity.

Regarding institutional factors, the book follows the example of earlier research (Blossfeld et al., 2005; Hora et al., 2019) and investigates the simultaneous influence of various policy dimensions. One important dimension is public regulation of the labour market. This is often conceptualised as employment protection regulation for regular work contracts and collective dismissals as well as the regulation of fixed-term contracts and temporary agency work. Another important dimension is active labour market policies such as further training measures, public job creation measures, counselling, and job search assistance provided by public employment services along with social work measures. Furthermore, the book analyses the role of PLMPs in relation to the generosity of unemployment benefits and social assistance (coverage, duration, and level of benefits). Public support for people in need also includes public social services such as provision of public employment services, childcare, healthcare, and social housing. Because the book also investigates housing autonomy, housing policy is also seen as a potential moderator of the individual-level effect of labour market insecurities on housing autonomy. Another institutional dimension of support is family allowances. For example, young people’s parents may qualify for family allowances to support their children, or young people who have already formed a family may qualify for family allowances themselves. Finally, social security programmes targeted at later phases, such as social security and pension programmes, may be just as relevant to young people, given that people are increasingly expected to start saving for such programmes at an early stage in their working lives, and labour market uncertainty may keep young people from making such savings.

In terms of cultural factors, next to country differences in cultural norms on gender and gender-specific welfare state arrangements, the
book considers the interregional differences in the functioning of the family. Scholars have identified considerable diversity in European family systems. They have contrasted family patterns in North-Western Europe, in which relationships between family members have grown weaker over the centuries, with those in Southern Europe, which are based on strong ties between family members (Papadopoulos and Roumpakis, 2013). There are also diverse patterns in Eastern Europe: some countries, such as Estonia, have an early home-leaving culture similar to Northern Europe; others, such as Croatia and Slovakia, have a late home-leaving culture similar to Southern Europe; whereas other Eastern European countries fall in between (Eurostat, 2020). Sociological research has often focused on how the family functions in Southern European cultures, highlighting its important role in offering affective and instrumental support for its members, because the family is considered to be the main provider of welfare in society. As a result of the 2008–09 financial crisis, these long-established patterns of intergenerational transfers and solidarities, which have played key roles in the transition to adulthood, may no longer remain intact—a phenomenon that can have dramatic consequences in young people’s lives (Chisholm and Deliyianni-Kouimitzis, 2014).

**Analytical perspectives of this book**

The contributions to this book are guided by the novel multilevel theoretical model outlined in this section.

In general, all chapters take a cross-country comparative perspective, but they differ in their approach to studying the moderating influence of the macrocontext. Some chapters take a quantitative comparative approach and use macroindicators to figure out the effects of specific variables in the macrocontext. Other chapters summarise the macrocontext in typologies such as welfare state typologies (Esping-Andersen, 1990) in order to capture the joint effect of a combined set of structural, institutional, and cultural configurations.

In terms of the timing of these analyses, what all chapters have in common is that they analyse the experiences of youth in a period of financial crisis that includes recession and austerity measures in some countries, especially in South-Eastern Europe. Many countries have responded to recent crises by cuts in public spending and retrenchments of their welfare state, also referred to as austerity policies. The generosity of public benefits has been reduced, eligibility conditions have been tightened, and private responsibility for ensuring an individual’s own welfare has been promoted. The findings presented in this book reflect
these general circumstances in countries that are affected in different ways by economic recession and austerity measures.

It is important to note that the aim of this book is not to ‘test’ the multilevel and multidimensional theoretical model developed here or its components and relations in any strict sense. Such an endeavour is clearly beyond the scope of a single edited volume. Instead, the book aims to take the model as a conceptual ‘umbrella’ for several exemplary analyses, focusing on different outcome variables (health and well-being, autonomy, and socio-economic situation), analysing different sets of countries, and applying different methodologies (discussed in the following section). In doing so, it provides first insights into the usefulness of this new theoretical model. At the same time, it may be seen as an invitation to further scholars to apply this model in their own research.

**Multimethod European comparative approach**

A major goal of this book is to investigate the influence of the macrocontext using a *multi-method and European comparative approach*. Hence, it engages in comparative research by means of systematic quantitative or qualitative comparisons designed to determine the moderating influence of the macrocontext. This comparative approach is not based on a country case study design focusing on individual countries, because the interest is not in the features of a country itself; and it does not try to provide a full description of each country case. This is also the reason why the selection of countries differs between chapters. Countries are chosen systematically for their ability to cast light on the impact of the macrocontext on the specific topic under investigation. In general, one can distinguish two comparative approaches in such systematic investigations.

Chapters using *quantitative comparative analysis* apply statistical multilevel analyses on comparative microdata (Bryan and Jenkins 2016) to quantify the moderating role of the macrolevel context – specifically, the effects of policies. In order to attain a high degree of freedom for this statistical approach, chapters in which quantitative analysis is applied try to maximise the number of countries to be studied given data limitations. In the *indicator-based approach*, the complex macrocontext is broken down into separate dimensions that are operationalised as macroindicators with the aim of isolating the effect of the respective macrovariable. The isolation of the effect of the variable of interest is done by statistically controlling for other confounding macrovariables. In the *typology-based approach*, typologies of welfare regimes are applied
to quantify the impact of bundles of structural, institutional, and cultural context factors.

In chapters using qualitative methods for comparative analysis, a number of approaches are taken. A specific statistical approach, qualitative comparative analysis (QCA), is used for comparative welfare state research (Emmenegger et al., 2013). Based on logical inference, combinations of macrocontext conditions are sought that determine the outcome of interest. In the case-oriented approach, a limited number of countries is investigated in a so-called small-N comparison (Ebbinghaus, 2005). Depending on the design of the study, countries may be chosen that are known to be similar in many respects (most similar cases) or those with a particularly low degree of similarity (most different cases). The inclusion of particularly striking individual cases (deviant or extreme cases) can also be useful for testing theoretical assumptions. Justification is made either based on specific macrocontext conditions or by applying existing typologies of countries based on clusters of macrocontext conditions.

The qualitative versus quantitative comparative approach is also mirrored in the type of analyses on the individual level. Some chapters follow the quantitative approach on the individual level when studying individual-level effects of labour market insecurity on various outcome dimensions. Statistical techniques of multivariate data analysis are used to control for confounding variables on the microlevel in order to isolate the effect of labour market insecurity. Other chapters follow a qualitative approach on the individual level.

All these chapters draw on in-depth qualitative interviews that were collected in the framework of the Horizon 2020-funded EXCEPT project in which the editors and authors were engaged over several years (see, for details, Bertolini et al., 2018). The aim of this qualitative study was to gain a better understanding of the situation of youth experiencing labour market insecurity in different contexts, and especially to gain insights into how young people self-perceive their situation in different life domains and how they cope with risks of social exclusion. The unique qualitative comparative data make it possible to learn from the often overlooked and unheard voices and subjective perspectives of young people themselves. The interviews provide an in-depth understanding of how disadvantaged young people perceive their social situation and try to cope with it in different economic, institutional, and cultural environments.

A total of 386 interviews were conducted with youth from nine European countries representing different macrocontexts: Bulgaria, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Sweden, the Ukraine, and
the UK. The samples were recruited using criteria which aimed to guarantee comparability but also to tap into national specificities. The sample in each country was composed of young people aged 18–30 years but with an oversampling of those aged 18–24 years in one of the following occupational conditions: NEET, temporary workers, or non-contractual workers. In addition, young people with permanent jobs were included as contrasting cases. All educational levels were represented with an oversampling of young people with a low level of education. At least half of the respondents were directly involved in ALMPs or PLMPs. The sample was balanced for gender and it included minority ethnic and/or migrant groups. In terms of regional coverage, at least two different areas (big cities and small towns or villages or rural areas) with different macrostructural regional characteristics were taken into account. Furthermore, specificities of each country were considered by identifying risk groups and oversampling specific categories.

The organisation and analysis of this vast and rich qualitative interview material required the construction and adoption of common methodological tools and procedures among all nine EXCEPT country teams. This work was the final output of an intensive and complex three-year process structured in the following steps: (a) the common definition of the tools among the qualitative researchers involved: in particular, the outline of the semi-structured interview, the national sampling plans, the codebook to codify transcriptions of the interviews, and the outline of a synopsis to summarise the main issues in each interview; (b) the fieldwork in the nine countries in order to collect 386 face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with young people following the sampling plan; and (c) the analysis of the interviews in each country and writing of national reports.

The method applied to the interview data in each country was thematic analysis. This uses a categorising strategy as a procedure for encoding qualitative information. Thematic analysis involves searching across a data set (that is, a number of interviews) to find repeated patterns of meaning (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun and Clarke, 2006; Grunow and Evertsson, 2016). In order to identify themes (and subthemes), researchers in the EXCEPT project were advised (a) to use both an inductive (bottom-up) and a deductive (top-down) approach – that is, to rely both on the data (what the participants/individuals actually say) as well as on theory; and (b) to use both a semantic approach (which means to look at the explicit, surface meanings of the data) and a latent approach (to examine underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualisations).
Structure of the book and outline of the chapters

As well as this introductory chapter, the book is framed by a concluding chapter (Chapter 15) that synthesises the main empirical findings, addresses issues associated with effective policymaking, and identifies future directions for research. In between, the thematic chapters (Chapters 2 to 14) are structured in three general parts representing three key outcome dimensions on the individual level identified in the multilevel theoretical model described earlier in this chapter, each of which subsumes various, strongly interrelated subdimensions. One unifying element of all three parts is that the key microvariables of interest refer to labour market insecurities such as unemployment, NEET, or job insecurity.

Part I unites studies on the consequences of labour market insecurities for health (Chapters 3 [Baranowska-Rataj and Strandh], and 5 [Schlee et al]) and subjective well-being such as happiness (Chapters 2 [Nizalova et al] and 5 [Schlee et al]) and life satisfaction (Chapters 2 [Nizalova et al], 4 [Lauri and Unt], and 5 [Schlee et al]). Digging deeper into the mechanisms of how labour market insecurity relates to self-perception, Chapter 6 (Roosmaa et al) focuses on the ways in which young people in different national contexts construct the meaning of work and their expectations towards work embedded in their personal labour market experiences.

Part II combines strongly interrelated topics of job insecurity and different types of autonomy associated with transitions to adulthood. In particular, Chapters 7 (Goglio and Bertolini) and 8 (Bertolini et al) examine housing autonomy and how it varies in different institutional contexts. Chapter 9 (Meo et al) scrutinises how young people define and gain economic independence in different contexts. Digging deeper into the mechanisms, Chapter 10 (Meo et al) investigates the role of informal support from family, close friends, and wider social networks in the process of gaining autonomy; and Chapter 11 (Ricucci et al) elaborates on how labour market policy measures are subjectively perceived and assessed by young people in their transition to the labour market.

Part III addresses the socio-economic consequences in terms of subjective and objective individual-level and household-level poverty and material deprivation (Chapters 12 [Kłobuszewska et al] and 13 [Figgou et al]), and social security (Chapter 14 [Hofäcker et al]). In previous literature, the topics of poverty and material deprivation have often been considered together due to their strong interrelationship. Adding the social security dimension to poverty
and material deprivation makes sense, because in EU welfare states, social security is an important aspect of the medium- and long-term socio-economic situation of a person; even though the guarantee of one’s individual welfare has increasingly become the responsibility of (young) individuals themselves.

Given that all chapters apply a cross-country comparative design, they all test the *moderating macrolevel context* as outlined in our multilevel model mentioned earlier. Various chapters use quantitative comparative analysis methods in this regard. For example, taking an indicator-based quantitative approach, Chapter 2 (Nizalova et al) in Part I studies how a country’s macroeconomic situation, in terms of its unemployment rate and GDP, moderates the effect of individual unemployment and job insecurity on unhappiness and life dissatisfaction. Chapter 7 (Goglio and Bertolini) in Part II investigates the role of institutional configurations such as the level of employment protection legislation for regular and for temporary contracts and the level of public expenditure on housing policies with regard to the effect of unemployment and job insecurity on the timing of housing autonomy. Following a typology-based quantitative approach, Chapter 3 (Baranowska-Rataj and Strandh) in Part I analyses how the effect of individual unemployment on a partner’s health is moderated by the type of welfare regime.

The other chapters use qualitative comparative analysis methods. Chapter 4 (Lauri and Unt) in Part I uses QCA to disentangle the importance of particular combinations of institutional factor (ALMPs and PLMPs, and family regime) and structural factors (unemployment rate) as moderators of the individual-level relationship between unemployment and well-being. All remaining chapters use a case-oriented qualitative approach to focus on the small-N comparison of two to four of the countries in which the EXCEPT qualitative interviews were conducted. Systematic comparisons are used to plot the role of various structural, institutional, and cultural macrocontext conditions. For instance, Chapter 8 (Bertolini et al) and Chapter 9 (Meo et al) in Part II investigate the meaning of and the strategies used to gain housing and economic autonomy among young people facing job insecurity in light of the different institutional arrangements in each country. Chapter 10 (Meo et al) of Part II shows the mediating role of informal social support in this process and how it relates to formal welfare provisions. Chapter 11 (Ricucci et al) in Part II investigates how the effect of unemployment on the economic situation of youth is moderated by ALMPs and PLMPs. Chapter 13 (Figgou et al) in Part III explores social and material consequences of young people’s unemployment and job precariousness in light of the different
economic situations and socio-economic policies in selected countries. In particular, it explores the ways in which participants construct their experience of labour market exclusion and uncertainty and represent their implications in their private and social life.

Some chapters also address the important issue of the moderating mesolevel context as outlined in the multilevel model described earlier in this chapter. For example, Chapter 5 (Schlee et al) addresses the role of mesolevel coping strategies in managing potential negative effects of unemployment and job insecurity on well-being. Taking into account that patterns of psychological behaviour cannot be understood solely from the point of view of the individual but have to be explained through reference to the mesolevel of society, the authors of this qualitative research chapter examine the role of mesolevel components in dealing with job insecurity, anxiety, and distress. Chapter 11 (Ricucci et al) delivers insights into the role of public employment agencies and other mesolevel actors directly involved in delivery of ALMP measures. Drawing on qualitative data, the chapter attempts to gain a better understanding of the ways in which young people deal with state policies and the related services these offer in order to ameliorate their access to the job market and their life conditions. Another perspective on the mesolevel is taken in Chapter 3 (Baranowska-Rataj and Strandh) which investigates the adverse effects of individual unemployment on the closest family members – that is, the partners – by exploring the mediating role of the family context and close relationships when dealing with the negative consequences of unemployment on young people’s well-being.

Each thematic part also reflects the methodological structure of the chapters, because each part has both quantitative and qualitative chapters. The following briefly introduces the data sources for the thematic chapters. These include various European microdata sets: the European Social Survey (ESS) (Chapter 2 [Nizalova et al]); the European Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) (Chapters 3 [Baranowska-Rataj and Strandh], 4 [Lauri and Unt], 7 [Goglio and Bertolini], and 12 [Kłobuszewska et al]), Chapter 14 (Hofäcker et al) is based on desk research and qualitative expert interviews. The remaining Chapters 5 (Schlee et al), 6 (Roosmaa et al), 8 (Bertolini et al), 9 (Meo et al), 10 (Meo et al), 11 (Riccucci et al), and 13 (Figgou et al) used the rich qualitative research material from EXCEPT semi-structured interviews.

The present edited volume brings together the work of a group of international scholars across Europe who have been researching and reflecting on the implications of labour market insecurity on young
people’s lives. Combining comparative research with quantitative and qualitative data, the book contributes to a better understanding of the changing social and economic conditions that emerge in Europe by taking respectful account of what young people, as social actors, have to say about their life experience.

Note

1 In each qualitative chapter part of the sample of interviews is used. The subsample analysed is specified at the beginning of each qualitative chapter. Please note that the quotations of the interviews in the qualitative chapters are identified by: pseudonyms, sex (M/F), age (in years), level of education (based on ISCED scale – LE [low level ISCED 0-2], ME [medium level ISCED 3-4], HE [high level ISCED 5-8]), employment status (NCJ [non-contractual job], TE [temporary employment], PE [permanent employment], U [unemployed], NEET [not in education, employment or training]), and country code.

References


